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Regional planners tout concept of urban clusters near transit lines

Called 'The 2 Percent Strategy,' the development plan for the Southland would build denser housing and businesses along arterials, bus and subway routes while maintaining the single-family lifestyle for the rest of the area.

By Kerry Cavanaugh
STAFF WRITER

Faced with the prospect of 6.3 million more residents being crammed into Southern California by 2030, regional planners released a blueprint Tuesday for handling the housing and transportation crunch by clustering housing shops and jobs near major transit lines.

Called "The 2 Percent Strategy," the development plan would build denser housing and businesses along arterials, bus and subway routes, maintaining the single-family lifestyle for the rest of the area as it grows by the equivalent of the population of Washington state.

"We don't have to change the entire region," said Mark Pisano, executive director of the Southern California Association of Governments, which sponsored Southern California Compass growth visioning effort.

"Basically we're saying we will continue to develop traditional neighborhoods ... on the

other hand there is a growing percentage of the population, either because of age or preference, that wants a different form of housing."

The 2 percent is roughly the amount of property in the six-county SCAG region that would need a big change in land use or density to have dramatic impact on traffic, air quality and housing affordability.

The goal is to move homes close to jobs and jobs close to homes, Compass team leader John Fregonese said.

As an example, he pointed to the area around Staples Center, which planners envision as a vibrant urban community with apartment homes and shops close to downtown's business skyscrapers.

Similarly, a host of heavy residential San Bernardino communities could benefit by luring more logistics jobs to Ontario.

SCAG ran its growth plan through some computer models and found if implemented the region could see 50 percent reductions in air pollution and

the number of vehicle miles traveled; a 50 percent increase in mass transit ridership; and about 400,000 new housing units built that would cost up to 35 percent less than current market rates.

Whether local communities will actually act on the proposal remains to be seen.

The plan sounded great to Montclair Councilman Bill Ruh, but he questioned whether political leaders throughout the region would approve transit development and denser housing in their own districts given the frequent public outcry over such projects.

"How do you change the minds of every council person that says 'I want density, but not in my town?'" Ruh asked.

From now through 2010, SCAG plans to meet with individual cities and transit districts to get them to alter their general plans and other major growth blueprints to reflect the 2 percent strategy.

The Compass visioning process began after SCAG real-

ized traffic and air quality would only get worse under the current development model. The agency spent \$2 million and hired a consultant team to cross city and county lines to create the region's first comprehensive regional growth plan.

During 13 community workshops, planners asked residents to place stickers on giant maps of Southern California to pinpoint where new homes, jobs and mass transit could go.

Participants quickly saw the enormity of the problem and a majority proposed building housing and jobs close to transit lines.

The SCAG board approved the 2 percent strategy and incorporated elements into its regional transportation and air quality management plans for Los Angeles, Ventura, San Bernardino, Riverside, Orange and Imperial counties.

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